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UNCLAS DHAKA 002414

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ALLEGED MANAGEMENT RECRIMINATIONS AGAINST WORKERS
DURING EPZ ELECTIONS

1. (SBU) Summary: Labor advocates allege factory management of improprieties and recriminations against union leaders during EPZ elections while BEPZA makes only tentative responses to address the allegations. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Coinciding with Worker Recreation and Welfare Committee (WRWC) elections in the Export Processing Zones (EPZ), Solidarity Center (SC) reports acts of intimidation against workers, including suspensions of workers. In mid April, at Shasha Denims Ltd., management suspended one worker, according to his suspension letter, for meeting with workers during production time, using vile language, a single instance of failing to follow instructions to bring supplies to the assembly line, and threatening the manager. The worker allegedly confessed to these actions to management.

3. (SBU) The worker, a loom operator, and a five-year employee, denied the allegations in a letter to the factory management and stated that he was being singled out because of his advocacy for WRWC elections. He alleged that he and others were transferred to other jobs in which they had no experience and then when he won a seat on the WRWC, management began to take benefits away from workers, causing workers to blame the WRWC election for their loss. According to workers, management called them in and asked the WRWC members to resign, promised to double their salary if they did but promised "problems with your jobs" if they did not.

4. (SBU) Bangladesh International Garment Union Federation (BIGUF) and SC reported several of factories, such as Regency Garments Ltd., Denim Plus, Kang Book, an alleged supplier for Reebok, and others located in both Savar and Chittagong EPZs, have dismissed employees without cause. Many of the dismissed, were allegedly only expressing dissatisfaction with management selecting the nominees. The workers protested, subjected to management harassment, threatened with firing, and then terminated when they did not agree to management's WRWC candidates.

5. (SBU) Solidarity Center reported these recriminations and a number of alleged management improprieties during the EPZ elections to the Executive Chairman of Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA), Md. Zakir Hossain. The improprieties include not provided training to employees on the election, not permitting campaigning by nominees and managers instructing workers not to take part in elections. In one case, at Beximco Fashions, factory owners put up their own list of 15 WRWC candidates and then announced that because that was the required number of members, no election was necessary.

6. (SBU) BEPZA has responded to the suspensions by establishing one-man investigation committees to review them. Kamal Akhtar, General Manager of the Dhaka EPZ, said that a one-man committee will review the firing of the worker at Shasha Denims. He expected that a determination will be made within one week. Solidarity Center was pessimistic on the determination, noting that in similar dismissals and subsequent investigations not one employee has gotten their job back.

7. (SBU) Comment: Out of the 220 EPZ factories nationwide, elections have been held in 130, with improprieties reported in perhaps 20 factories ranging from dismissals without cause to abnormally large numbers of WRWC nominees suddenly withdrawing their nominations. SC reported the improprieties to BEPZA as early as last December.
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